DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 747 RC 018 594

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TITLE A Study of Swiss Village Education.
PUB DATE 11 Oct 91
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Rural Education Association (Jackson, MS, October 10-15, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Administration; *Educational Finance; *Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Rural Schools; Small Schools; *Track System (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This case study focused on the educational effectiveness and economic efficiency of village education in the Baselland Kanton in Switzerland. Information was gathered through personal interviews with administrators and teachers, and observations in six schools. Some of the findings of the study were: (1) the administrative structure consists of a central office (with a chief administrator, general administrators, and school inspectors), local principals, and local school boards for primary schools; (2) financial support comes from taxes on personal wealth; (3) there is a strong belief in the benefits of small organizations and community schools; (4) at the primary level classes are heterogeneously organized by grade level, but at the secondary level students are assigned to three ability tracks; (5) teachers and administrators perceive little social tension between the tracks; (6) homework is assigned in all grades; (7) teachers appear to have a good rapport with students and a high tolerance for noise; (8) teachers generally speak positively of working in small village schools; and (9) teachers enjoy a high status because of high academic standards for admission to teacher training. Although the Swiss are fairly content with their present educational system, recent world events may affect the wealth of Switzerland and require modifications in the educational system. (KS)

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A Study of Swiss Village Education[1]

by

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"It is on purpose that we call it the educational system of Switzerland and not the Swiss educational system." (OECD, 1990, p. 3)

"This [idea of compromise] explains a great political stability which some critical minds sometimes consider mediocrity, but which meets the needs of the majority of Swiss, who prefer evolution to revolution." (Egger, 1984, p. 8, emphasis added)

Switzerland is a country of many contrasts in spite of its small size (16,000 sq. mi. - slightly smaller than the combined land space for the States of Vermont and New Hampshire and 2/3 of which is habitable) and small population (6.5 million). It has a contrasting geography including low rolling mountains of the Jura in the north, the flat mid region, and the Alps in the south. In the most southern part of Switzerland and often to the surprise of many people grows subtropical vegetation including palm trees and the climate is relatively mild year-round. Also Switzerland is one of the most multilingual countries in Europe. There are four national languages including German, French, Italian, and Romansch. The population divides nearly equally into two religious groups:

[1]Paper presented at the National Rural Education Research Forum, Jackson, MS, October 11, 1991.

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Protestant and Catholic.

In addition to its diversity, Switzerland has a rich tradition of direct democracy. In 1291 the Swiss Confederation was created which became a federal state in 1848. Governmental authority is highly decentralized and shared across 26 autonomous political entities called cantons. Decentralization and direct democracy have logically produced the militia system: no professional army or permanent parliament. Someone has estimated that it takes five years to enact a federal law in Switzerland. The Swiss have tried to ensure that power at the federal level is limited and widely distributed. They have a federal parliament comprised of two equal chambers. These chambers elect seven persons to a Federal Council who in turn annually elect one of its members as president, which is actually only of a representative nature.

In addition to Switzerland's cultural diversity and rich tradition of a model democracy, the country enjoys a wealth and status of a modern industrialized nation. As a recent article in Time magazine stated:

> Ironically, Switzerland is a mini-model for the new confederal Europe. No melting pot here; instead it is a patchwork stitched together for common convenience--and prosperity--with each part retaining its distinctive culture and mores. There is no center, no dominating commercial or political capital. Power is even more discreet than money, and like money in the richest of all European countries, it is spread around. (p. 19)

Switzerland's unique background and contemporary stature provide a rich setting in which to study educational policy and practice. Fortuitous circumstances (e.g., sabbatical leave and a daughter who lives in Switzerland) provided an opportunity to further explore the nature of the Swiss society and the nature of its educational system. This paper will explore what was learned from reading reports, interviewing Swiss educators, and observing in primary and secondary schools in the Baselland Kanton.

STUDY PURPOSES

Presently, it seems, we are witnessing a paradigm shift of a significant magnitude. Old assumptions about world order, political and economic divisions are being challenged daily. The recent breakup of the Soviet Union is but one example of old ideas and assumptions no longer being valid. In addition we hear ominous forecasts of pending economic crises and increasing disparity among rich and poor nations which often flow along ethnic and cultural lines. Wealthy countries like the United States and Switzerland are finding themselves being drawn into major political and ethnic clashes in a variety of countries throughout the world. Competition among wealthy nations to protect their current standard of living seems to be increasing and becoming more tense. All of these dramatic and rapid changes place considerable pressure on the infrastructure of industrialized nations and particularly their educational systems.

Rightly or wrongly, political leaders and citizens in general look to educational systems to provide the knowledge, skills, and

values needed to sustain a stable and productive nation into the future. In an uncertain world as we are witnessing today, it becomes less clear whether current educational policies and practices should be maintained and/or changed. In the United States there is considerable attention being given to school reform and restructuring. Is the current American experience unique or are other wealthy, industrialized nations facing similar challenges? The study of Swiss village education in part strives to answer this question.

This study focused on village education in the Baselland Kanton for several reasons. First, in the era of rising expectations for schools to cure many societal problems, rural or village schools quite often bear the brunt of these demands. Small rural schools are often more isolated, under funded, less efficient and therefore are seen as a problem in need of fixing. This often translates into imposing more centralized, large systems models of education into a rural context where the fit is very problematic. Switzerland provides a comparable setting in which to examine how another society is dealing with the need to provide quality education in remote places like small, somewhat isolated villages.

A second reason for studying village education in Baselland Kanton is because of its rural nature but also its proximity to a large urban area centered in the city of Basel. This provides an opportunity to sense the impact of a large urban environment that borders the northern most boundary of Baselland.

And finally the good fortune of having my daughter and her

family residing in a small village near the geographical center of Baselland provided a unique opportunity to observe firsthand the lifestyles of Basellanders. Her fluency in German and familiarity with the location of different villages and their respective bus schedules proved invaluable.

STUDY QUESTIONS & DESIGN

This study was guided by an over arching question:

How are the Swiss schools, particularly in rural areas, able to balance the twin and often conflicting pressures of demands for greater educational effectiveness and demands for economic efficiency?

In order to gain insight into this over arching question, several areas were explored. The following categories guided much of the data gathering process:

- Administrative and governance structure
- Financial support
- Philosophy and policies
- Curricula, programs, and services
- Parents and community
- Teacher perceptions

The design of this study was essentially a cross-cultural case study. Following standard case study methodology (Merriam, 1991) and cross-cultural research methods (Lonner & Barry, 1986), the above question and categories of information were pursued during August, 1991. Access to reports, personnel, and school sites was facilitated by a Baselland Kanton school inspector who had

administrative oversight of a number of Baselland schools. Time constraints limited the number and level of schools to visit and the number of personnel to interview. The following sources were explored:

Interviewed:

- One Baselland school inspector
- Four rectorats (principals) (2 primary and 2 secondary)
- Six teachers (3 primary and 3 secondary teachers)

Observations

- One one-room school of 13 students, grades 1-5
- One two-room school of 52 students, grades 1-3 & 4-5
- One school of 300 students, grades K-8 located in three different buildings in the same village
- One 6-8 grade program of 15 students in a two-room school
- Two secondary schools of grades 6-9 of 332 students and 135 students respectfully

STUDY FINDINGS

Findings for this study are sorted by the categories identified above.

Administrative Governance & Structure

- The canton has a central office managed by a chief educational administrator and a cluster of general administrators and school inspectors. The chief educational administrator is a member of a board of five elected executive officials to whom he

reports. This administrative unit oversees the entire spectrum of educational institutions from the primary schools through the university.

• The school inspectors have direct contact and administrative oversight of the primary and secondary schools. One of their primary responsibilities includes the appointment of new teachers and reappointment of one year and four year teachers. This responsibility is shared with the school boards who have final authority. Also they are often called in to mediate disputes between parents and teachers.

• The number of teachers and pupils determines the hours allocated at the building level for school administration. If there are six or more teachers in the school, it is eligible for some support from the canton to provide some administrative time. For example in the 300 pupil, K-8 student populated school the principal is allocated five hours per week for his principal duties. In another school of two teachers, one of these teachers is allocated one hour for administration, two hours for being over 55 (next year it will go to four when the teacher turns 60), and two hours because of the extra time given to school matters. A substitute teacher covers his class for a total of five hours each week.

• The principals' duties are primarily administrative in nature. These include setting the number of classes needed for coming school year, assigning teachers and pupils, developing an annual school budget (school board is informed and advises but does

not approve), helping in the appointment and reappointment of teachers, meeting regularly with the school board and teachers, arranging substitute teachers, and helping problem solve student, parent, and teacher conflicts.

• There are local (community) schools and regional (cantonal) schools. All communities are responsible for operating their kindergartens and primary schools overseen by a school board elected by community citizens. The secondary schools (levels 1 & 2) are operated on a cantonal basis and overseen by a school board representative of the feeder communities and fiscally supported by the canton. The one exception to this pattern is a program called the Realschule. For students who are considered slow learners, each community runs its own secondary 1 level program, grades 6-8. At the ninth grade level (the last year of their compulsory education) students attend a cantonal vocational school. (See Attachment A for an overview of Baselland's educational organizations.)

Financial Support

• Switzerland enjoys the highest gross domestic product (GDP) of Europe and spends 5.8% of the GDP on K-12 education. (U.S. spends only 4.1% GDP on K-12 education.)

• Taxes on personal wealth (including property) paid to the canton and to the community provide funds to support the educational systems of the canton. The primary schools and Realschule programs are primarily financed locally with budget shortfalls made up by the canton.

• On average the local community pays half of the local school budget. In addition local schools and their communities are eligible for grants generated by a lottery at the cantonal level.

• Books and other nonconsumable equipment are provided by the canton. Local schools must pay for its own facilities and consumable supplies.

• Each community can decide for itself if it would like to have a school facility regardless of the size of the student population. They are required to locate the facility near the center of the town and must provide a gym facility open to use by both the community and the school.

• There are no school buses. Families are responsible for their own transportation. Public buses, bikes, and walking are the most common ways of getting to and from school.

Philosophy and Policies

• There is a strong belief in the benefits of small organizations therefore primary schools (K-5) usually will not exceed 200 students and secondary level 1 (6-9) will fall somewhere between 300-400 students.

• There is a strong belief in the value of community schools particularly at the primary level. For example, one school visited had 13 students grades 1-5. These children come from eight families, four of whom are represented on the school board of five members. The fifth member is a representative from the local town government.

• School boards have direct say in who is hired and rehired at

their school (teacher contracts are limited to four years) and are expected to conduct classroom visits to evaluate teacher performance.

• Inter-village cooperation is encouraged in accommodating small numbers of students who may need certain courses at the secondary level or greater cost efficiency at the primary level. For example, two villages about a mile apart have a 4-5 class for both villages in one village and a 6-8 class for both villages in the other village.

Curricula, Programs, and Services

• At the primary level no distinctions are made concerning ability levels of students except for serious physically and emotionally handicapped children. These students are assigned to special schools and may require special transportation arrangements. Thus, all classes are organized by grade level and are heterogenous in nature.

• At the secondary level (grades 6-9) students are assigned to one of three options. The low ability students (approximately 20%) remain in a self contained program in their local school. The middle level average student (approximately 60%) are assigned to the general track. The high ability or more academically talented student (approximately the remaining 20%) are assigned the progymnasium track which will eventually permit entrance into the gymnasium (academic secondary school) and the university. It is estimated about 10% of the students go on to university studies. The general track students may attend a variety of vocational,

trade, and special institutes upon completion of ninth grade.

• The curricula at both the primary and secondary levels are subject matter driven. Some differences at the primary level (grades 1-5) from American schools is the inclusion of religion and bible classes, a first language is High German, an oral second language at grades 4 and 5 (French is taught in Baselland as a second language), and crafts. These are taught by the classroom teacher with the possible exception of religion which is then taught by a local minister from grade four on.

• Some differences at the secondary level for the general track student is the addition of third and fourth language electives at the 7-9 grades. This will include Italian, Latin, and English in addition to continuing the native language (German in Baselland) and French. Also physics and chemistry are required at the eight grade level and an elective at the ninth grade.

• The progymnasium student is expected to carry a much heavier academic load requiring German, French, English (7-9), history, math (6,7), geography, biology with chemistry and physics (9), music, and art. Depending on whether the student is a humanities student (which requires an additional course in language of either Latin or Italian) or math/economics student (which requires additional advanced math) will determine course requirements.

• The Baselland curricula have specific time requirements by grade level (which are becoming more flexible than in the past according to their new reform effort). In any regard, the day's schedule is broken into time blocks of approximately an hour each

at which time certain subjects are taught. Below is a breakdown on the current time requirements by grade and by track where appropriate.

Grade	Hours	Grade	General Track Hr.	Progym Track Hr.*
1	20-22	6	32 (no electives)	32 (+4 electives)
2	21-23	7	31 (+2 electives)	33 (+5 electives)
3	23-26	8	29 (+4 electives)	34 (+9 electives)
4	25-28	9	22 (+10 electives)	34(+11 electives)
5	26-28			

*(Please note that the electives for the progym track students are optional and do not count toward the students' academic average.)

• The school year is twelve months starting and ending in mid-August. With vacations including six weeks in the summer the students attend approximately 38 weeks of school. The students also attend six days a week but do have Wednesday and Friday afternoons off and attend a half day session in the morning on Saturday.

• The primary school schedule for students is quite variable. As can be observed in the attached schedule (See Attachment B), students are arriving and departing from school at a variety of times resulting in teachers teaching only half a class at certain times. At the beginning of the school year each student is randomly assigned to one of two groups. The consequence of this assignment is a different schedule of attendance for half the class who may also share some common times. There is some parent pressure to establish a common time each day from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Also at mid-day families gather to have their big meal for the day thus schools close from noon to 1:30 p.m.

• The schools in Baselland use a 1 - 6 grading system with 6 being the highest. Grades are important since they play an important role in assigning students to streams and future courses.

• Subject area specialists (e.g., handcrafts, home economics, industrial arts, music, etc.) are hired on a part time basis through the school board at the canton or community level like other teachers. The secondary level one schools do have academic counselors.

Teacher Perceptions

Tracking

• Teachers and administrators perceive little social cleavage or tension between the different streams (tracks). They explain this in part because of the social contact students maintain outside of their classes that bridges any differences.

• Fifth grade teachers do feel considerable pressure in their decision to assign students to one of three streams. They base this decision on grades, past progress reports, evidence of concentration in studies, reliability in completion assigned work, and quickness of acquiring new skills and knowledge. Parents may appeal the teacher's decision and/or request to take an examination.

• Some concerns were expressed about the disproportionate emphasis on the upper track students and how this seems to drive the system's priorities.

Homework

- Homework is assigned in all grades and secondary programs particularly on Wednesdays and Fridays since the students have these afternoons off.

- Homework is expected and students are conditioned at an early age to be responsible for completing these assignments.

- Homework seems quite trivial at the lower levels (e.g., practice the forming of letters, complete math problems, etc.).

- Secondary teachers indicate that completion rates for homework are not ideal and there is some ambivalence how teachers should handle incomplete assignments.

Pupil-teacher Relationships

- Teachers appear to have a genuine liking for their students and a comfortable rapport exists between the students and teachers.

- Students appear to have considerable responsibility for their own behavior (e.g., unsupervised hallways and playground, getting to and from school on their own, completion of homework assignments, different class hours at the primary school level, etc.)

- Teachers seem to have a high tolerance for rambunctious and noisy behavior. Children settle their own disputes and respond well when told to work on their assignments.

Small Schools/Small Villages

- Generally teachers spoke positively of working in a small school and small village. The advantages observed was a stable home life, students know what is expected and respond accordingly,

closer personal relationship with the students, slower pace, more flexibility, more teacher autonomy, and greater informality between the home and the school.

- Some minuses mentioned was the large number of individual subjects (12) and in multi-graded classes having to teach these subjects separately to each grade, limited contacts with other teachers, pressure to assign students to the higher stream, limited resources, greater reliance on reading and writing types of independent assignments, difficulty in finding substitutes, and possible lower academic standards.

- One primary teacher did speak of some discomfort of a fishbowl existence and the strong domination of parents in school matters (i.e., determining the class schedule).

Teacher Training

- Teachers enjoy a high status in part because of the high academic standards required of teachers to gain admission to a teacher training institute or the university.

- Preparation for teaching does not seem to provide enough direct supervision of instruction. After teachers are hired they are pretty much on their own. Administrators do observe but provide little or no assistance in the improvement of instruction.

- Teachers are required three weeks of inservice training during their four year contract period. Some teachers view this as minimal and teachers can take easy offerings to fulfill this requirement.

Summary

Some concluding thoughts about the Baselland school system include the following:

1. The system is highly formalized and structured in defining procedures and policies (i.e., down to the half hour allocated for secretarial services based on student enrollment).

2. Financial support seems very stable but the absence of microcomputers at the primary school level suggests some limitations.

3. Small size and more personal attention to students is highly valued.

4. Administration responsibilities and duties are narrowly defined which places greater autonomy and responsibility on teachers.

5. School boards have considerable power in the appointment and reappointment of teachers.

6. In general parents are not very involved with the schools except as members of the school board.

7. Although students' streaming assignments cause some anxiety, teachers decisions usually go unchallenged. The quality and continued opportunities regardless of stream assigned may take some of the concern out the this decision. (See Attachment A.)

8. The curricula of the schools seems to be highly subject oriented and time driven. Although some efforts are underway to provide more flexibility on time requirements and to encourage more integration of subject matter.

9. Students appeared to be generally well behaved and

responsible for their own actions. However, it should be kept in mind that emotionally and physically handicapped students are assigned to special classes at more centralized facilities.

10. Small village schools enjoy comparable educational opportunities particularly at the secondary level as their larger counterparts. Some exception to this was a 1-5 school of 13 students where the teacher was attempting to keep separate the five grades and trying to accomplish the same level of curricula coverage. Truly a mission impossible.

11. Teachers enjoy high status (ranked fifth overall) and are paid well by Swiss standards ($54,000 average salary for primary school teachers) and very well by U.S. standards. Also teachers' salaries are the same across the entire canton.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was a modest attempt to peek in the window of another culture and compare the experiences of Swiss educators particularly in rural areas with experiences in U.S. The study was guided by two concerns: 1) the demand for greater effectiveness and 2) the demand for greater efficiency. In other words, how do the Swiss maintain a high standard of education and equalize educational opportunities in rural areas when faced with fiscal constraints?

I learned the following:

1. That the Swiss are fairly content with their present educational system. This is in part because of their heavy financial investment in their schools, a long history of running

their system in the current mode, the congruence between societal values and school practices, little or no external pressure for change, and the capacity to respond in an evolutionary way to any perceived problems.

2. That demands at present for greater efficiency do not exist in part because of the wealth enjoyed by this tiny industrialized nation. A high standard of living enjoyed by most Swiss places less pressure on the schools to economize and there is a willingness to support the costs of education. There is some evidence of cost savings by delaying the purchase of new curricula materials and related computer technology.

3. That beneath this apparent contentment with their schools, Swiss are beginning to express some concerns about the future. There is some evidence of discontent among young people being manifested in drug problems and social alienation. Some factors contributing to this level of discomfort are the uncertainties associated with the formulation of United Europe and whether Switzerland will join the organization. Presently they are third on the list for admission behind Sweden and Austria. However, the issue is only in the discussion phase, there has been no formal application. There are risks in joining and not joining. This country seems to have benefitted well over time from their stance of neutrality. However, there are many unknowns concerning the impact of Japanese competition, the breakup of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the resurgence of ethnic rivalries and military clashes, and the economic and social impact of United

Europe. For example Switzerland is experiencing an influx of immigrants from the countries of Italy, Turkey, and India. How the children of these immigrants are assimilated in Swiss schools is a major concern and an added expense.

In any regard, the future will no doubt alter the Swiss standard of living to some degree and many of these issues may become more extreme forcing more dramatic changes than have been experienced to date. This study could only briefly illuminate the nature of Swiss education particularly in the rural areas of Baselland. There are many more questions that this study seems to suggest. Some lingering questions include the following:

1. What are the educational experiences of foreign students (20% of the student population)? Do they experience prejudicial behaviors of their teachers, are they relegated to lower groups, are they given equal opportunity to succeed, what is their response to Judeo-Christian teachings in bible stories and religion classes, etc.?

2. What problems do secondary schools face with their students particularly in programs beyond the compulsory ninth grade?

3. What social and educational impact does segregating emotionally and physically handicapped children have?

4. Are teachers satisfied with the slow pace of curricular and program change and school boards' role in evaluating them for reappointment?

5. How do parents feel about the school's streaming policy

and with the streaming decision being made at the end of fifth grade?

Switzerland has enjoyed over time what appears to have been effective educational systems. They have managed to reduce any major disparities between the urban and rural schools. There are many advantages to living in the rural countryside and there is continued pressure on these villages to provide the space and infrastructure to support the increased growth in the rural areas. How much longer the comfort level enjoyed by most Swiss will continue is anybody's guess. In the meantime, Switzerland continues to enjoy a quality of life that is the envy of many in the world. As Time expressed it

> For the present, despite the current hand wringing about the future, the Swiss are not ready to gamble away a 700-year-old success story. For the first time in this century, though, they must contemplate an alternative destiny. (p. 22)

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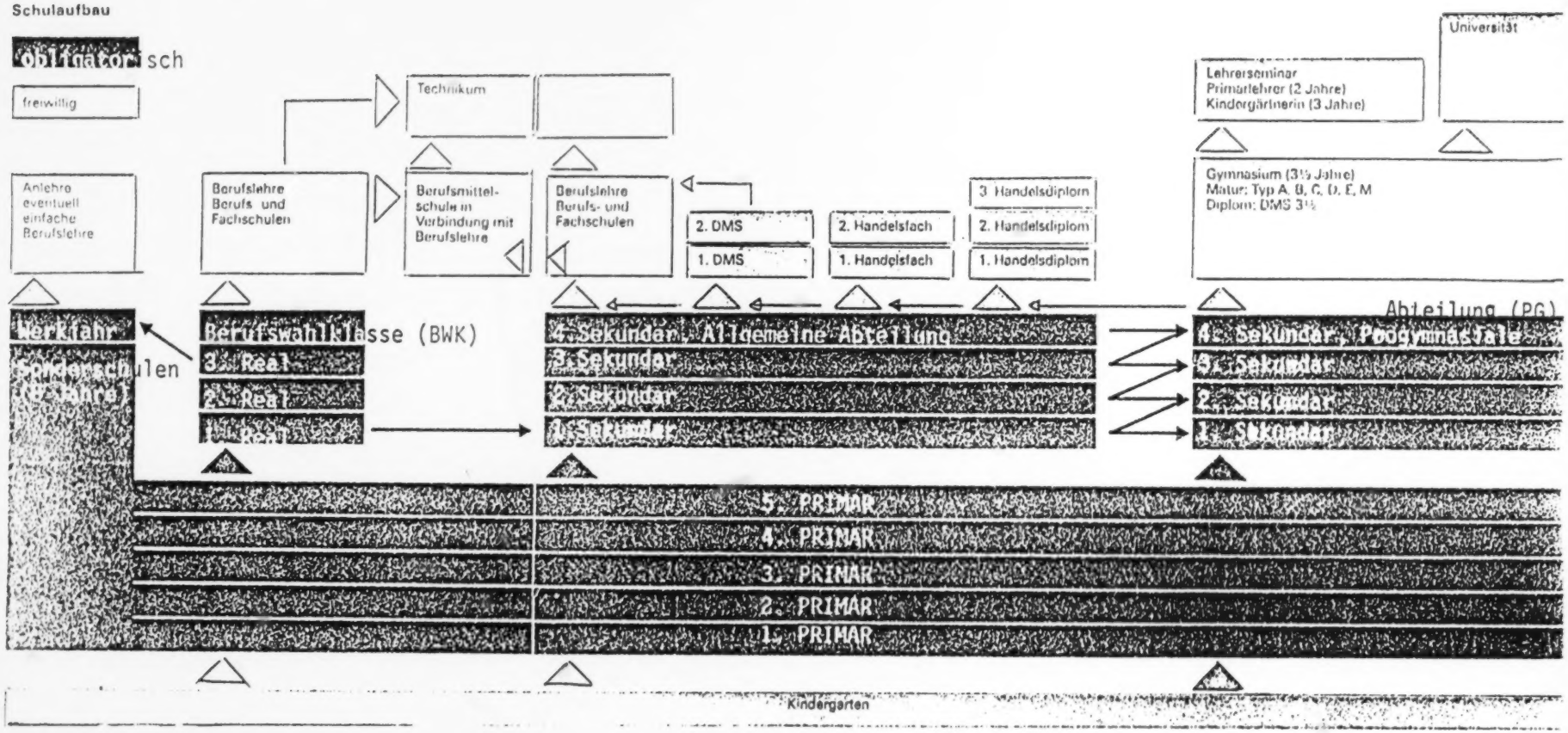
ATTACHMENT A



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ATTACHMENT B

STUNDENPLAN 91/92 Anja Matthias

Zeit	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Samstag
7.05 Anja 7.00-8.50	A	M	A M		A M	A M
8.55-9.45	A M	A M^{T}	A M	A	A^{T} M^{T}	A M
10.05-10.55	A^{T} M	A M	A M	A M	A M	A
11.00-11.50	A M	A	A^{T}	A$^{Pd.}$ M		A
13.30-14.20		A M		A M		
14.30-15.20	Anja · PIANO 15^{00}-15^{30}	A M		A M^{T}		

T = Turnen (or Gym !!)